

# Draft Environmental Assessment

## Missoula Electric Cooperative Easement for Cyr Powerline Expansion



September 2021



**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**

**Region 2**

**3201 Spurgin Rd, Missoula, MT 59804**

# Missoula Electric Cooperative Easement for Cyr Powerline Expansion

## Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

### **PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION**

1. Type of proposed state action: To grant a conveyance of a perpetual easement for Right of Way (ROW) to Missoula Electric Cooperative, Inc., across 1.01 acres of land owned by FWP (in the Cyr area of Mineral County, Montana), for buried and/or overhead powerlines.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:**  
Section 87-1-209(4) of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) authorizes the Director of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to grant or acquire (from willing sellers) easements for the purpose of utilities when necessary and advisable for the management and use of department property. Consent of the Parks Board or Fish and Wildlife Commission is not required when the value of the interest acquired or conveyed is less than \$20,000.
3. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor:**  
Missoula Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
1700 West Broadway  
Missoula, MT
4. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
  
Initial overhead line re-build and underground line bore  
Estimated Construction Commencement Date: October 2021  
Estimated Completion Date: October 2021  
Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 100% complete  
  
Future powerline inspections and needed work
  - Inspection of the overhead lines and poles: once every 10 years
  - Replacement of poles: once every 50 years
  - Inspection of ROW: once every 2 years
  - Trimming of trees within ROW: every 10 years
5. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**  
Mineral County; Parcel 2, C.O.S. 529 in the S2SW4 Section 36 T5N R24W (Figures 1-4).





Figure 1. Vicinity map of proposed project at Upper Osprey FAS.

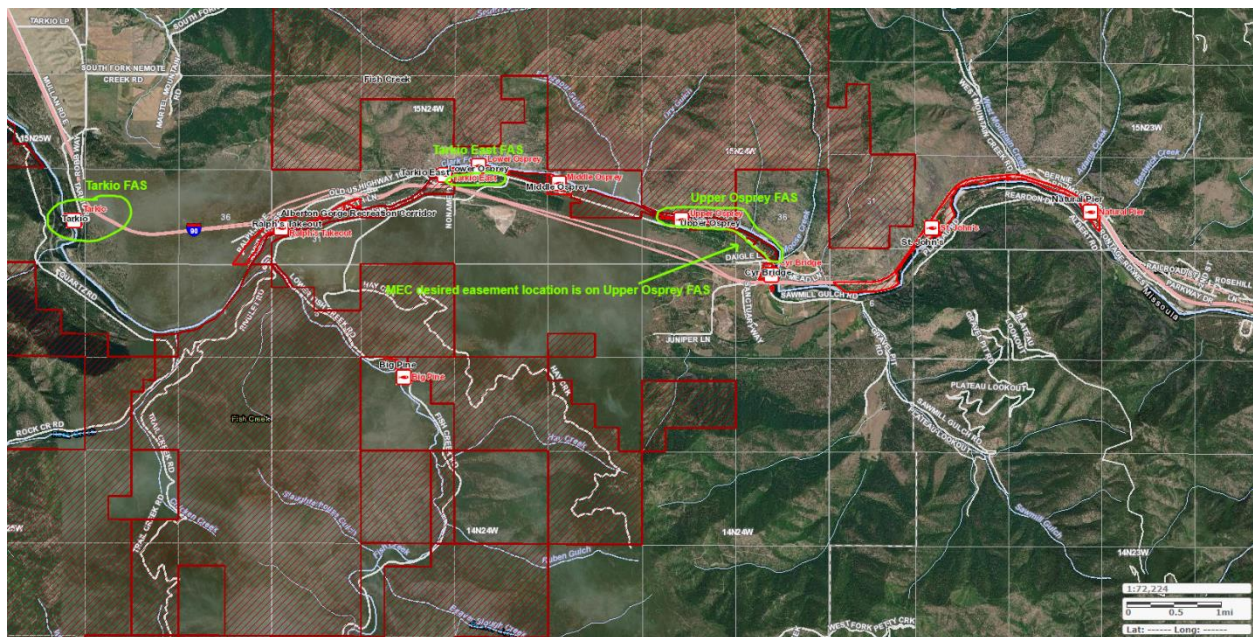
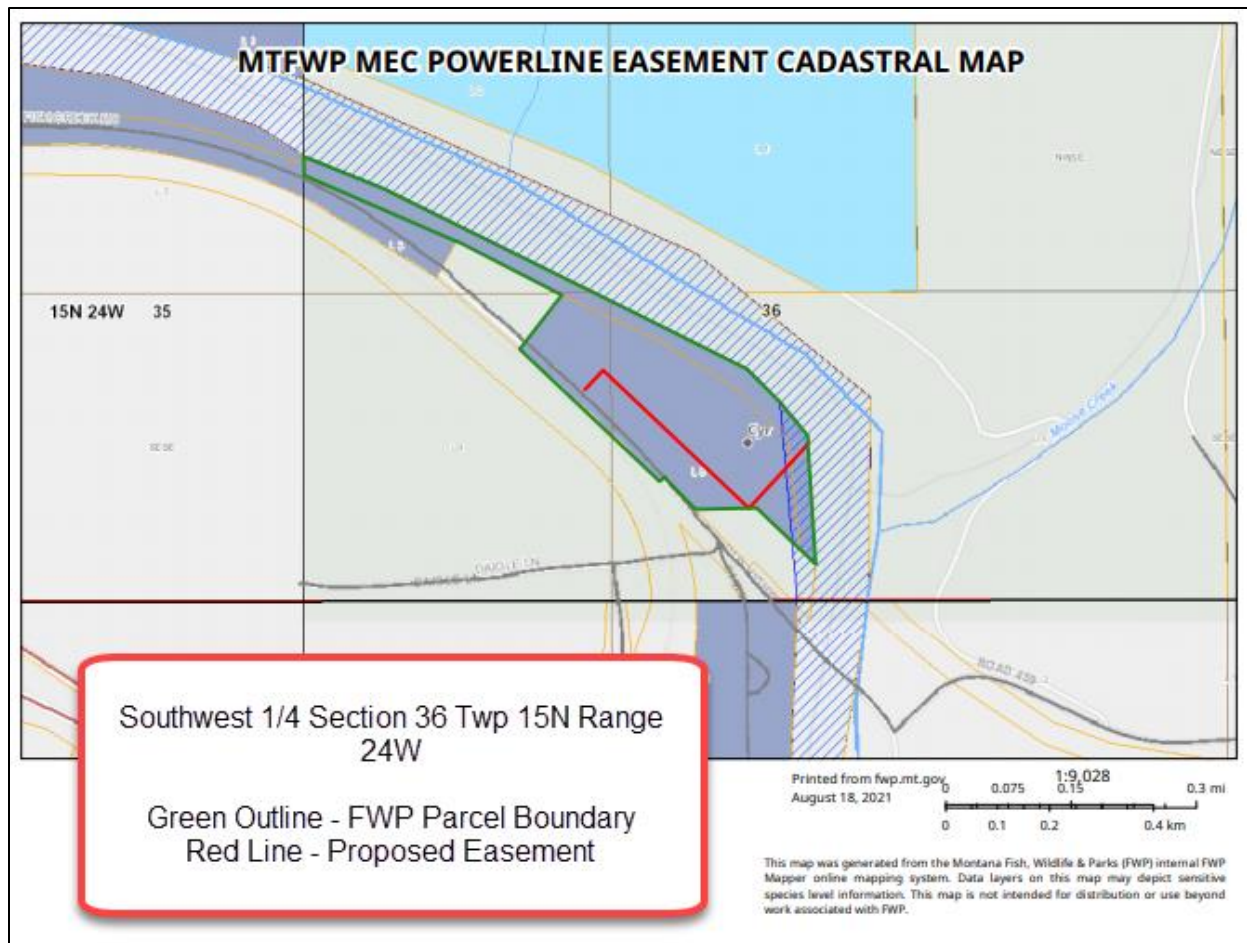


Figure 2. Aerial map of general area of the proposed project at Upper Osprey FAS.



**Figure 3.** Map showing proposed location of powerline easement within Upper Osprey FAS.

**6. Project size--estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

Land Type	Affected Area (estimated in acres)	Land-type Total (acres)
<b>a. Developed:</b>		
Residential	0	
Industrial	0	
Other: road	0	<b>0</b>
<b>b. Open Space/ Woodlands/ Recreation</b>	1.01	<b>1.01</b>
<b>c. Wetlands/ Riparian Areas</b>	0	<b>0</b>
<b>d. Floodplain</b>	0	<b>0</b>
<b>e. Productive:</b>		
Irrigated Cropland	0	
Dry Cropland	0	
Forestry	0	
Rangeland	0	
Other	0	<b>0</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>1.01</b>





**Figure 4.** Aerial map showing proposed location of powerline easement within Upper Osprey FAS.

**8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

- a. **Permits:** permits would be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.  
None.
- b. **Funding:** 100% funded by Missoula Electric Cooperative. Based on a standard rate of \$100/rod for a new easement, this easement is valued at \$8,939
- c. **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:** None

**9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:**

Missoula Electric Cooperative, Inc. (MEC), has requested that Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) grant it a conveyance of easement for Right of Way (ROW) over land FWP owns on Upper Osprey Fishing Access Site (FAS) in Mineral County. The proposed project involves upgrading an existing overhead powerline and installation of 175 feet of new underground powerline.

The purpose of the project is to rebuild the existing powerline from single phase to three phase. The additional phasing would provide needed capacity at the end of this line where the load has been growing rapidly due to development. The project would increase the number of overhead wires from two (one 7,200-volt primary and one neutral) to four (three 7,200-volt primaries and one neutral). The system voltage would remain at 7,200 volts phase-to-ground and 12,470 volts phase-to-phase. The four wires would be spaced five-feet apart for a total spacing of 30 feet. The profile view of the new system would not change from the existing profile. In addition to the upgraded overhead line, the project would also include 175 feet of new underground powerline.

Anticipated impacts of this project include minor soil disturbance for the new underground powerline, accompanied by some noise and other effects of using heavy machinery during construction. This work could disturb wildlife and users of Upper Osprey FAS. These disturbances would be temporary and minor but are expected to occur on an intermittent basis in perpetuity, as MEC conducts maintenance and other needed work on the powerline (see 4. Anticipated Schedule. above; the frequency of this work is estimated).

#### **10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

##### **Alternative A: No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not agree to grant MEC the requested easement. Under this scenario, MEC could lose the opportunity increase capacity for this powerline, which could negatively impact MEC customers.

##### **Alternative B: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP would grant the requested easement to MEC for the purposes of upgrading and expanding the existing powerline from single phase to three phase, thereby increasing its load-carrying capacity.

#### **11. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

Best management practices would be followed during all phases of construction/installation, including preserving existing vegetation where feasible, pre-washing equipment prior to being transported to the site, spill prevention and response measures, good housekeeping practices on the job site, and reseeding with native species if needed.

## PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

### A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		<b>1</b>
2. Air quality or objectionable odors			X Temporary			<b>2</b>
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				x		<b>3</b>
4. Existing water right or reservation				x		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X Temporary		x	<b>5</b>
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				x		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X Temporary			<b>7</b>
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				x		<b>8</b>
9. Introduction of new species into an area				x		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species				x		

**1.** The proposed project would involve changes to the number of wires and the length of the mast arms for the existing power lines. The 175 feet of new underground powerline would be bored. No impacts to soil resources are anticipated.

**2.** While heavy equipment is operating, there would be some temporary emissions of diesel exhaust and dust. The proposed project would have no significant impact on air quality.

**3.** The Mineral County Conservation District was contacted for comment on the proposed project regarding potential water impacts because the project is located near the Clark Fork River. The District had no comments. No impacts to surface or ground water resources are anticipated.

**5.** Vegetation would be temporarily disturbed or impacted along the overhead route by vehicle traffic but would be allowed to revegetate after construction. Other vegetation near the bore sites

would be disturbed by heavy machinery, but that impact is anticipated to be minor and temporary. If necessary, disturbed areas would be reseeded with grass and forb species recommended by FWP.

**7.** While the work is underway, there would be temporary impacts due to vegetation disturbance and the presence of workers and equipment. These impacts would cease once the project is completed.

**8.** No designated critical habitat exists within the project area.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects			X Temporary			<b>1</b>
2. Land use				x		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				x		
4. Community impact				X		<b>3</b>
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				x		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				x		<b>6</b>
7. Aesthetics and recreation			X Temporary			<b>7</b>
8. Cultural and historic resources				x		<b>8</b>
9. Evaluation of significance				x		
10. Generate public controversy				x		<b>10</b>

**1.** There would be noise while the heavy equipment is operating during construction.

**3.** The proposed project is meant to increase load capacity for users down the line and should have no impact on local employment. However, upgrading the line would indirectly aid growth in the immediate area.

**6.** All costs for the project are being incurred by MEC.

**7.** During construction, public day-use of this area may be restricted for safety purposes. However, this site is not used as a boating access location so temporary impacts to users are expected to be minor. Construction duration is expected to last approximately two weeks in the fall of 2021 and then intermittent thereafter. Access to the area may be partially restricted during inspection and



maintenance times, which is expected to take: a few hours every 2 years for inspection of the ROW; a couple hours for testing of the powerline every 10 years; and 1-2 days for scheduled pole replacement every 50 years.

8. No cultural resources inventory has been performed for the proposed project. However, the 1,300 feet of line upgrade lies within a previously disturbed right of way, and the 175 feet of new underground power would be installed adjacent to a dirt road. Therefore, the project is unlikely to have impacts to cultural resources.

10. It is not expected that this proposal would generate public controversy.

### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

The impacts resulting from the powerline upgrades and new underground powerline are expected to be minor and temporary. While some noise, fumes, and other disturbances are expected to occur, these would be short in duration and cease upon completion of the project. Some minor maintenance would be necessary over the years, but these impacts are also expected to be minor and temporary. While the project area is located on FWP lands designated as Upper Osprey FAS, there is no boat dock, camping, or dock on the site and public use is light, so impacts to recreationists would be minor and temporary.

Overall, anticipated impacts from this project should be of short duration and minor in scope, and granting the easement would benefit MEC customers.

### **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### **1. Public involvement:**

The public would be notified in the following manner of the opportunity to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- One public notice in each of these newspapers: *Independent Record* (Helena), *Mineral Independent* (Plains), and *Missoulian*.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks webpage <http://fwp.mt.gov>
- The draft EA would be posted on FWP's webpage <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News & Public Notices," then "Public Notices").
- Copies of this environmental assessment would be mailed (or notification of its availability emailed) to neighboring landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies) to assure their knowledge of the Proposed Action.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

## **2. Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period for 15 days following the publication of the legal notice in the *Missoulian* newspaper. Written comments must be received by FWP no later than October 4, 2021 and can be emailed or mailed to the addresses below.

Comments can be emailed to Sharon Rose at [shrose@mt.gov](mailto:shrose@mt.gov), or mailed to:

FWP Region 2  
Attn: Sharon Rose  
3201 Spurgin Rd  
Missoula, MT 59804

## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

### **1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No.**

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment under MEPA, this environmental review revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action; therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis. In determining the significance of the impacts, FWP assessed the severity, duration, geographic extent, and frequency of the impact; the probability that the impact would occur; or reasonable assurance that the impact would not occur. FWP assessed the growth-inducing or growth-inhibiting aspects of the impact; the importance to the state and to society of the environmental resource or value affected; any precedent that would be set as a result of an impact of the proposed action that would commit FWP to future actions; and potential conflicts with local, federal, or state laws. As this EA revealed no significant impacts from the proposed actions, an EA is the appropriate level of review and an EIS is not required.

### **2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Linnaea Schroeer, FWP MEPA Coordinator

### **3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

- Fisheries, Parks & Wildlife staff Region 2.
- Lands Unit
- Legal Unit
- Responsive Management Unit